THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) to (c) The Government had conducted a detailed study in 1988-89 to study the usefulness of the traditional postal system in India and possible improvements in the light of advancement in scientific technology. The recommendations of the study were carefully examined and it was decided to adapt technologies to the needs of the post in the following areas :—

(i) Introduction of computer based multipurpose counter machines with a concept of a single window for all types of transactions.

(ii) Use of Satellite Technology for money transfers.

(iii) Computerisation of Registration Sorting and Transit Mail Offices.

(iv) Setting up of Automatic Mail Processing Center in major metropolitan towns.

(d) to (f) More than 71 lakhs transactions per month are being performed on computer based multipurpose counter machines and over 10.5 lakhs money orders are being transmitted on the Satellite. More than 12 lakh mails are being processed daily on the Automatic Mail Processing Centers at Mumbai and Chennai. Action taken in this regard has resulted in provision of better services to the customers across the counter, less queuing time, enhancing customers satisfaction and has expedited money transfers as well as the processing of mails.

Revision of pay-scales of Extra Departmental Employees

3838. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian Postal Department enjoys a special distinction of being a State run postal system spread all over the rural areas of the country ;

(b) whether the Extra Departmental Employees handles bulk of the postal work in the Rural areas of the country and are not being paid a dignified Wage, being exploited and are not being regularised ; and

(c) what steps Government have taken or propose to take to regularised them and also appoint a Departmental Pay Commission for a proper pay review of the EDA/EDEs ?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS (SHRI TAPAN SIKDAR) : (a) Postal services in the entire country including rural areas are provided by the Department of Posts as per provisions of Indian Post Office Act, 1898 and Rules framed thereunder. According to these statutory provisions, the Department of Posts has monopoly in the matter of letter mail articles only.

(b) and (c) Extra Departmental Agents (EDAs) numbering 3,09, 915 as on 31-3-99 are responsible for the entire rural postal net work Comprising 1,28,193 ED Post Offices in the country, The Extra-Departmental System which is more than a century old has proved its worth as a practical and viable method of extending basic postal facilities to rural areas where due to inadequate work-load full-fledged departmental posts offices cannot be set up. The ED Agents are engaged on specific terms and conditions which vary significantly from those of regular Govt. employees. ED Agents are required to work for a period of 2 to 5 hours per day only and it is necessary for them to have alternate source of independent livelihood. Being local residents of the post village or the delivery jurisdiction of the Branch Post Office, they enjoy acceptability in the local community they serve. ED Post Office provides all basic postal services including agency functions which are of benefit to the rural population and help in socio-economic development.

Terms and conditions of engagement for ED Agents have been revised from time to time by the Government progressively extending allowances and other payments on pro-rata and resulting in additional benefits for ED Agents.

In the context of setting up of the Vth Central pay Commission for regular Central Government employees, the Government had set up a one man committee headed by Justice Charanjit Talwar, retired judge, Delhi High Court to examine the wage structure and service condition of ED Agents and the Committee submitted its report to the Government on 30-4-97. After due consideration of the recommendations of justice Talwar Committee, the Government extended a package of benefits to ED Agents in full and final settlement of all pending demands relating to implementation of justice Talwar Committee's recommendations. This package of benefits extended through the order of Department of Posts dated 17-12-98 provided the following additional benefits for the ED Agents:—

(i) Payment of arrears for the period 1-1-1996 to 28-2-1998 by increasing the basic allowance of ED Agents by multiplying it with a factor of 3.25.

(ii) Introduction of Time-Related Continuity Allowance (TRCA) on the pattern of first two scales of pay recommended by the Justice Talwar Committee for each category of ED Agents (except ED SPMs for which only one TRCA).

(iii) Provision of paid leave for 10 days for each half year, without the facility of carry forward.

(iv) Increased limit of ex-gratia gratuity for ED Agents from Rs. 6000/- to Rs. 18,000/-.

(v) Increased amount of Office maintenance Allowance from Rs. 25/- per month to Rs.50/- per month for EDBPMs. and EDSPMs.

(vi) Payment of lumpsum Severance Amount of Rs. 20,000/- or Rs. 30,000/- depending on period of employment of ED Agents, on demitting office at the age of 65 years or after absorption against regular departmental post. as a form of post employment benefits.

Recommendations made by justice Talwar Committee also including those for rationalising the ED system, reducing the number of ED Agents and also capping future growth of the system. But appreciating the relevance of the ED System for the rural postal network and its social benefits, Government have not implemented these recommendations. The Government's policy therefore, ensures full justice to the interest of ED Agents. The benefits extended to the EDAs through order dated 17-12-98 were then estimated to involve recurring additional annual expenditure of Rs. 301.35 crores, over and above an amount of Rs. 157.74 crores on account of payment of arrears for the period of 1-1-96 to 28-2-98.

Improving the terms and conditions of engagement of Extra Departmental Agents including the prospects of eligible ED Agents for absorption against regular vacancies is a continuing exercise. Existing rules of recruitment for the cadres of Postman, Postal Assistant/Sorting Assistant and Grade "D" already provide for preference to eligible ED Agents for recruitment against departmental post.

Tele-density target

3839. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA : Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state :